The fight for a more modern Quebec

LE JOUR
EMERGENCE DU LIBERALISME MODERNE AU QUEBEC

BY VICTOR TEBOUL
Hurtubise HMH, 436 pages, $25

REVIEW BY RONALD SUTHERLAND

Victor Teboul's candid analysis of the myths and images of the Jew in Quebec, published in 1977, created quite a stir. His latest book, a study of the weekly newspaper called Le Jour, which was founded by Jean-Charles Harvey in 1937, deals with an equally controversial subject and is equally thorough and candid. One should be careful not to confuse Harvey's Le Jour, which lasted nine years until 1946, with the later Quebec nationalist newspaper of the same name, which was published as a daily from Feb. 28, 1974, to Aug. 24, 1976, then as a weekly from Feb. 4, 1977, to Jan. 13, 1978. The latter Jour claimed to be inspired by Harvey's paper, but in many respects it was the very opposite. For one thing, Harvey was adamantly opposed to tribal Quebec nationalism.

Harvey was also anti-clerical, or at least against what he considered the authoritarian abuses of the Quebec Roman Catholic Church. His 1934 novel, Les Demi-civilisés, totally innocent by modern standards, was banned by Cardinal Villeneuve in a decree that "forbade the faithful, under pain of mortal sin, to read, keep, loan, buy, print or distribute the book in any way." Harvey subsequently lost his job as editor-in-chief of the newspaper Le Soleil, and when Maurice Duplessis became Premier in 1936, Harvey was told to get out of Quebec City. He went to Montreal and defiantly founded Le Jour, which would soon become the organ of liberal, progressive thinking in French Canada.

Although he had to fight all the way, the church establishment and traditional nationalists such as Canon Lionel Groulx remaining openly hostile to his ideas, Harvey was remarkably successful. Teboul's study demonstrates that almost every reform espoused by Le Jour in the thirties and forties has become a fact of life in the Quebec of the seventies and eighties. These reforms ranged from the complete overhaul of the church-controlled education system to such mundane incidentals as the development of an apple-cider industry and the selling of table wine in corner grocery stores.

Canon Groulx: an openly hostile attitude toward the newspaper

The first part of Teboul's book is by far the most interesting; it examines Le Jour's position with regard to the fundamental values of Quebec society of the time. Harvey himself deplored the lack of initiative and backwardness of his compatriots. Using the United States as a model, he urged French Canadians to copy the Americans, to plunge competitively into free enterprise, to industrialize, to take control of the economy. In other words, the reverse of what Canon Groulx and other clerics were preaching, which was to preserve an agrarian, Christian Quebec modelled on a mythical past of their own invention.

In effect, Harvey and his colleagues at Le Jour elaborated almost precisely the policy which Premier Jean Lesage would adopt when he launched the "Quiet Revolution" of the sixties under the slogan "Maitres chez nous."

In the field of education, long before Donald Gordon made his famous remark that the dearth of French Canadians in the CNR executive suites was simply because hardly any had the necessary qualifications, Harvey was stressing the same point. While others were crying discrimination, he was calling for reform of the traditional classical college program of studies, which consisted almost exclusively of Thomasian philosophy. To prepare students for the new Quebec he envisioned, Harvey insisted that higher education had to emphasize commerce, business administration, science and technology.

Unlike its modern namesake, Harvey's Le Jour saw the future of Quebec not as a separate nation, but as an integral and dynamic part of a federal Canada. The newspaper recognized that French-speaking Canadians were generally in an inferior economic position in the nation, but it urged them to remedy this situation through effort and strength rather than by hiding behind fences. Harvey's notion of "French power," of course, would eventually be realized, perhaps more effectively than even he had dared to dream.

The original Le Jour, incidentally, published many young Quebec writers who would later become prominent, including Gabrielle Roy, Yves Thériault, Jean-Jules Richard and Robert Choquette. The newspaper provided an outlet for Quebec's most original and independent thinkers, some of whom might not have been published otherwise.

Victor Teboul's thoroughly researched book is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the ideological evolution of French Canada. In particular it illustrates the extraordinary foresight, intelligence and courage of editor Jean-Charles Harvey, who quite probably should be considered the founding father of contemporary Quebec.

Ronald Sutherland teaches comparative literature at l'Universite du Quebec.

BOOK BRIEFS

A child's view of the world

SHULAMIS
Stories From A Montreal Childhood

by Shulamis Yelin
Vehicule Press, 158 pages, $9.95

Shulamis Yelin initiates her walk through the world of her childhood memories by returning to the Montreal Jewish immigrant neighborhood where her family lived during the twenties. As she stands in front of a brownstone that once housed her cherished Yiddish school, her lament for the physical destruction of the world of her past leads her to reconstruct it.

In an episodic memoir, Yelin affectionately reanimates the sentimental highlights of her childhood: the celebrations of Jewish holidays; her intense relationship with her family; the trauma of leaving her Yiddish school and entering the Protestant school system. Her descriptions are sensuous and visually evocative. Nevertheless, the significance of her recollections is never more than personal.

In A. M. Klein's poem Autobiographical, he describes seeking from his boyhood in Montreal "strength and vividness ... not tranquil recollection of event." Yelin's sweetly innocent and tranquil recollections never transcend the realm of family-album snapshots, because unlike Klein, who seeks significance from his past, Shulamis Yelin searches only for the sentimental.

— *Sherie Posesorski*

Review by Ronald Sutherland in The Globe and Mail of Victor Teboul's Le Jour. Émergence du libéralisme moderne au Québec

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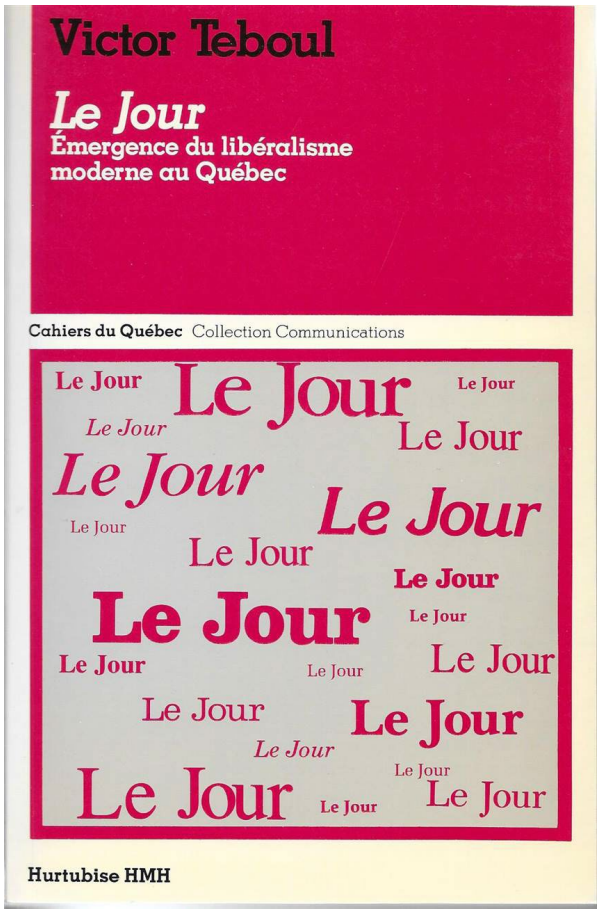

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Ronald Sutherland was a professor at Université de Sherbrooke from 1959 to 1997. He co-founded the program on Canadian Comparative Literature.

The Globe and Mail, October 12, 1985, p. C6.

Sutherland, Ronald. The fight for a more modern Quebec, The Globe and Mail [Toronto, Ont] 12 Oct 1985: D.19 (in the paper edition).

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